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ABSTRACT

The structures/systems required to ensure the quality of individual learning programs in further education (FE) in Britain and the coherence of learner achievement were examined through a study in which data were obtained from a survey of students in individual learning programs at two FE colleges and a literature review. At both colleges, personal tutors played the key role in ensuring ongoing guidance/support and access to central college services for all students. Neither college allocated personal tutors to part-time students, however. The subject tutors who acted as personal tutors for part-time students did not necessarily know about possible progression routes or central services within their college. Existing systems for part-time students did not systematically collect information about student purpose, and there was no central system for ensuring coherence for students studying units from different courses or across qualification routes. Most students considered the help they received in choosing their courses adequate; however, only 55% considered the various parts of their program to be linked together properly. (Concluding this document are checklists for evaluating coherence of student purpose, program design, and the learning experience and assessment. Appended are the student questionnaire and a summary of questionnaire responses.) (MN)

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Assuring coherence in individual learning programmes

Jim Bennett and Ian Davidson

Volume 1 Number 11



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Contents

1. Executive summary	5
2. Setting the context	7
3. The concept of coherence	9
4. Customised programmes and coherence	12
5. The participating colleges	13
6. Changes in participating colleges	16
Checklist A: Coherence of student purpose	18
Checklist B: Coherence of programme design	19
Checklist C: Coherence of the learning experience and assessment	20
Appendix 1: Questionnaire	21
Appendix 2: Responses to the student questionnaire	24

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Staff of North Wales Access and Credit Consortium (NWACC)

1. Executive summary

Aim

This research aimed to:

Define the structures and systems which need to be in place to assure the quality of individual learning programmes and in particular the coherence of learner achievement within a unitised curriculum.

In order to fulfil this aim the project set out to examine the coherence of:

- **purpose** — initial and on course guidance to clarify the aspirations of the learner on entering the programme and monitor the intentions of the learner through the programme
- **programme design** — advice and guidance needed to ensure the coherence of the proposed programme of study
- **learning experience and assessment** — systems for ensuring the coherence of the student experience

Methodology

Research was carried out through:

- desk research
- evaluating the systems of two providers
- seeking the views of students
- a literature search by FEDA's information service

Conclusions

External validating and awarding bodies are concerned with the coherence of their qualifications, rather than of student programmes.

The use of and demand for individual learning programmes, which mix qualifications and their sub-sets, are growing and will continue to do so.

The coherence of student purpose, programme design, and learner experience are the responsibility of the providing institution.

Recommendations

Programme design and management

Students transferring units or credit from one provider to another or students accumulating credit over a period of time need to be systematically identified by the provider.

Providers should review their college induction procedures in the light of the needs of students studying off campus and students who use college facilities outside the normal hours of study.

Students identified as following individual learning programmes of units, modules or short programmes designed for an individual purpose should receive appropriate guidance. Guidance should cover:

- student purpose
- programme design, including the identification of key skills requirements
- identification of skills on entry

An individual member of the provider's staff should bear the responsibility for an overview of the total choice of the student. This individual should monitor:

- appropriate choice of learning to meet student purpose
- any gaps or duplicated learning
- key skills requirements and acquisition
- range of delivery methods
- range of assessment methods
- amount of assessment

Providers should consider the use of synoptic assessment to draw together the experience of the learner and ensure that they can make connections between the different parts of their programme.

Quality assurance

Providers should determine what elements of their provision can be covered by a quality assurance (QA) framework for individual learning programmes.

QA systems need to operate in all areas of their provision and the effectiveness of their QA procedures for individual programmes and in more marginal provision — particularly off-campus and evening programmes.

Staffing

Part-time tutors taking on the role of personal tutor should receive staff development and have a clearly defined role.

Students isolated from central student services through studying on outreach or in the evening, should have their personal tutor clearly identified.

There are benefits in involving different staff members as a team in the delivery of an individual learning programme for planning purposes and discussion of student achievement.

Information

Descriptions of all the learning offered at the college need to be consistent and readily available to all tutors at all teaching centres.

There needs to be a clear link between initial guidance, and college and programme induction which ensures that students have all necessary information.

Providers should ensure that developing management information systems (MIS) meet the needs of students on individual learning programmes.

Centralised systems are needed for collecting information on a student's progress with an individual staff member identified to monitor progress.

Both staff and students can make better choices when a whole college curriculum is broken down into module descriptors which are readily available to all members of staff and which give consistent information on delivery, assessment and co-requisite and pre-requisite learning. Unit descriptors often do not give sufficient information.

2. Setting the context

The increasing flexibility and accessibility of further education (FE) provision through modular delivery have been reinforced by the unitisation of qualifications and the desire of FE colleges to attract increasing numbers and a more diverse range of students. Learners have consequently wanted/needed to construct individual learning programmes which may not be congruent with qualification structures. These programmes may be made up of modules or units of national qualifications and locally devised programmes. The drawback to this flexibility could be some incoherence in the way the programmes relate to the student's purpose, the design of the programme and the assessment and delivery experiences of the student.

It is important, however, to note that potential incoherence is not a direct consequence of modularisation of delivery and unitisation of qualifications. It could equally result from inappropriate combinations of traditional qualifications and course structures.

Concerns

The concerns frequently expressed by those both inside and outside the education system include:

- lack of control over student choice in a 'pick-and-mix' curriculum
- individual learning programmes, designed by students, which lack coherence, have gaps or duplication and inadequate key skills development
- the fragmentation of learning and the learner experience
- fragmented and excessive assessment
- gaps in assessment
- duplication of assessment

The project

FEDA therefore undertook a project to:

define the structures and systems which need to be in place to assure the quality of individual learning programmes and in particular the coherence of learner achievement within a unitised curriculum

The project examined:

a. Coherence of purpose

A coherent learning programme can only be designed to achieve a coherent purpose. Students may need initial and on-course guidance to clarify their aspirations before agreeing the details of their programme. It may also be necessary to monitor their intentions as they develop through the programme

b. Coherence of programme design

Having agreed a clear and coherent purpose, a system is needed to ensure that the proposed programme of study is designed to match that purpose.

c. Coherence of the learning experience and assessment

A common concern about unitised and modularised provision is that it may fragment the learning experience. Systems are needed to avoid over-assessment, to ensure connections between different parts of the programme and to help the student develop a synoptic view of the whole.

Methodology

This was done through:

- desk research on the roles of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, (NCVQ), Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) and awarding bodies in ensuring coherence

- working with two participating colleges to identify structures which assure coherence
- distributing a questionnaire to students on individual learning programmes
- a literature search by FEDA's information service

3. The concept of coherence

There is a tacit assumption that qualifications guarantee coherence. To the extent that they are well designed and delivered for a particular purpose that ought to be true but there is no guarantee. Students mix different subjects for a wide variety of reasons — subject preference, relations with individual teachers, career aspirations and relative difficulty. Different qualifications and their component parts are increasingly combined, and this practice is promoted through the recommendations of the Dearing 16-19 Review. In this context providers need to be concerned about the learner's whole curriculum; we can no longer assume that if individual qualifications are coherent, so will learners' experience be.

Individuals do want to design learning programmes to meet their own specific purposes. They are able to build these programmes from qualifications made up of individual units of assessment and a curriculum delivered through modules. This may involve combinations outside the usual choice of subjects and could involve being assessed by validating and awarding bodies with different philosophies and different approaches to describing learning and achievement. For example, learners are already combining Advanced-level General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) with GCE A levels which often means a choice of subject areas within two qualification routes with different purposes, design and ways of describing their learning.

The introduction of the National Advanced Diploma in September 1998 — as recommended in the Dearing Review of 16-19 Qualifications — will formally recognise achievement across a range of qualifications. Learners will be able to achieve the qualification by gaining a minimum AS or GNVQ Part Award in four out of five of the following complementary areas: Arts and Humanities, The Way the Community Works, Science and Technology, Mathematics and Modern Languages. In addition, learners will need to gain Key Skills in Application of Number, Communications and Information Technology. In order to complete the NATIONAL

Advanced Diploma, learners can use a combination of A level, GNVQ and NVQ qualifications.

It is not, therefore, that there was some point in recent history where the curriculum was 'coherent' but that moving to a unitised curriculum creates potential for incoherence. Many claim that a modularised and unitised curriculum, especially one which is credit based, allows learners the potential to create programmes that make far more sense to them than existing qualification routes. The concept of 'qualification' then becomes personal rather than national. Others, however, perceive the danger of a unitised and modularised curriculum in which students can select random and unsuitable combinations of units, without a course structure to provide coherence and with responsibility for the learner spread among a number of tutors, none of whom has an overview of the student's total experience or performance.

NVQs and GNVQs

NCVQ's publicity literature and the awarding bodies' guidelines to centres refer to unitised structures and the ability of learners to accumulate credit (or unit credit in the case of NCVQ) towards a qualification. They make little reference, however, to the criteria by which a centre judges the overall coherence of a student experience which includes credit transfer. GNVQ and NVQ references to assessment methodologies concentrate on the assessment of competence statements or performance criteria for the unit.

Examples

The following examples from NVQ/GNVQ literature deal with unit achievement and credit transfer:

Since awarding bodies participating in the NVQ framework recognise each other's certificates, and there are many units in the framework which are common to different awards, credit transfer is simple.

NVQ criteria and guidance (January 1995)

They can gain GNVQs unit by unit. This gives them targets to work towards, and means that if they don't finish the course they can still get a certificate showing the units they have achieved. If they want to finish the units that are left later, they can. Many students, particularly adults, want to study part time at college through work experience, private study, or a combination of these.

Your introduction to NVQs and GNVQs (NCVQ 1995)

...Units are not graded separately. Evidence towards the grading criteria will build up throughout a course...

GNVQ Briefing (June 1995)

Between them, these qualifications fit students for entry into higher education (HE), ensure work-based competence and provide a means of progression. The implication here is that achievement of them is based on the acquisition of units which themselves provide a means for accumulation of 'credit' towards the overall qualification. The literature search identified no guidance on:

- the number of previously acquired units which a provider responsible for recommending the award of the final qualification could take into account (the implication is all of them)
- in the case of GNVQ, how a grade is determined where a student transfers a number of units into a programme for final qualification — although it is assumed that a portfolio of work spanning all units would be used for this purpose

The GNVQ briefing refers to the transfer of learning from other qualifications towards a GNVQ qualification:

GNVQ assessment allows for the use of evidence from other courses or from everyday life, provided it can be authenticated. Similarly previous achievements may be offered for assessment. For example, credit may be given for achievements in Information Technology gained on a GCSE course. However, at this stage, credit transfer between GCSEs and GNVQs cannot be automatic; previous work will usually have to be assessed against GNVQ requirements.

Although achievement on other accredited learning programmes is recognised as counting towards the achievement of a qualification, that achievement still needs to be assessed against the requirements of a GNVQ. There is no advice given on how much prior learning can be counted towards a final qualification or how the provider responsible for the award uses this information to grade a final qualification.

Coherence is therefore deemed to derive from the design of the qualification. Where a learner follows the complete 'course' with one provider, it must be assumed that the provider takes responsibility for the overall coherence of learner experience and assessment (as well as initially confirming that the qualification matches the learner purpose). This is assumed rather than stated explicitly within the literature. Where a learner accumulates units over a period of time or from a number of different providers, the award of the qualification is triggered by the simple acquisition of units. This could be seen as a straightforward balance between flexibility and control, and the inevitable consequence of unitised qualifications. GNVQs and NVQs are still relatively new. No figures are available on numbers of students who are taking advantage of the system to accumulate units where there is a significant break in their studies or transferring units between providers.

Higher Level GNVQs: a consultation paper (NCVQ, 1995) stresses the benefits of individual unit award.

To realise the benefits of unit credits and credit accumulation, it is important that units can be assessed separately. If examinations or tests

were to span a number of units, these units could not be awarded separately. A regime which allows separate assessment does not prevent students carrying out activities which integrate the requirements of several units, and presenting major pieces of work which provide evidence for a number of units.

They are clearly stressing the importance of recognised unit achievement as the basis of credit accumulation while trying to avoid fragmented delivery and assessment. This is a compromise between flexibility and coherence. The statement also recognises the benefits of integrated delivery in providing coherence to the learner experience.

SCAA has put in place a series of ground rules, with which the examining bodies have to comply, for the design, delivery and assessment of modular A levels. While the code of practice is not primarily concerned with coherence, it does deal with some of the issues identified above:

a. Each module must be assessed at either the reformulated AS or full A-level standard.

b. 30% of the total assessment must be by terminal examinations. Terminal examinations are defined as those taken after the final date for entries in the year in which a candidate takes the final modules for aggregation.

c. Course work is limited to 25% of the total marks for the reformulated AS and 20% of the total marks for A level.

*d. Candidates may only re-sit module examinations **once** prior to the final award of the qualification. The shelf life of each module is limited to four years. These rules exclude the terminal modules which cannot be banked or resat.*

e. Synoptic assessment — which tests the candidate's understanding of the connections between the different elements of the subject — must contribute 15% of to the total value of the modular A level and be assessed within the terminal modules.

The code of practice has been revised in light of the Dearing Review of 16-19 Qualifications. This will see the introduction of a reformulated AS (Advanced Subsidiary) to replace the existing AS (Advanced Supplementary). The reformulated AS will comprise the first half of a linear or modular A level and will contribute 40% to the total value of the full award.

The trick is to identify systems which assure coherence of learner purpose, experience and assessment, but do not restrict learner choice or provider flexibility. Designers of qualifications are concerned primarily to protect the coherence of their own qualifications: NVQs and GNVQs include no guidelines about the accumulation of units; modular A levels introduce clear requirements.

Support for the learner

The designers of national qualifications are not explicitly concerned with the coherence of student experience. It therefore becomes the responsibility of the provider enrolling the student. If a learner chooses a modularised curriculum and unitised qualifications, they will, to a degree, lack the support of peers and the close relationship with tutors enjoyed by a student on a traditional course. They should be able to expect, however, support in determining the purpose and the design of the programme and monitoring their own progress, and a range of assessments to allow them to summate their achievement.

Awarding and regulatory bodies thus concern themselves with the coherence of their whole qualifications and their sub-sets; it is for colleges to ensure the coherence of the learner's experience. With the growth of more flexible sub-sets of awards, institutional mechanisms to ensure curriculum coherence will grow in importance. This publication identifies guidelines and some examples of good practice for those processes.

4. Customised programmes and coherence

An examination of customised programmes provides some assistance in determining how programme coherence can be determined outside the parameters of national qualifications. There is a growing body of experience in the provision of customised learning programmes in which coherence of design is recognised as an issue and addressed collaboratively by college staff and the local Open College Network (OCN) where appropriate.

The development of accredited customised programmes has been established through the OCNs and Access Consortia. Courses accredited by OCNs offer learners the opportunity to accumulate general credit which can be used to demonstrate achievement or to gain specific credit towards an Access certificate or award by another awarding body. There are numerous other local arrangements for credit transfer where students use credits to gain admission to a programme or exemption from parts of a programme. The initial level of coherence in all learning recognised by OCNs is the unit, described as 'a coherent set of learning outcomes'.

Where units form parts of larger programmes the provider needs to demonstrate, as part of the programme recognition process, that the programme offers the possibility of developing coherent programmes of learning. The recognition process is a peer group process which draws on expertise from different sectors within education. It is, however, recognised that not all learners will complete the programme and certification will often be for partial completion. The emphasis on coherence is therefore in the programme offered, not in the student achievement. Out of that total curriculum offer learners will often select their own programmes, through the guidance process of the provider, to meet their individual purpose.

Access courses provide a particular example of a locally devised qualification, designed for entry into HE. Although non-unitised examples

exist, most are both unitised and credit based: able to award credit for completion of units as well as the kitemarked Access certificate for completion of the programme (successful completion criteria form part of the submission). Access courses are individually designed by providers and approved by authorised validating agencies licensed through the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). Access courses need to be 'planned programmes of study' of at least 500 hours. It is the validation process which assures the coherence of the programme and approves any regulations concerning credit accumulation and transfer.

The BTEC Award is relatively new and still being piloted. It allows providers to develop customised programmes through a combination of units from national qualifications and units locally developed through an Open College Network. Students who successfully complete the programme receive a BTEC Award. The draft (July 1995) guidelines state that the 'combination of units ... provide a **coherent** and **meaningful** experience' (their bold) and 'in combining units of different levels centres should pay particular attention to the need for coherence and progression'.

These examples are useful in drawing attention to the growth of individual learning programmes and how their design is controlled to assure coherence. They say little, however, about how colleges can address such issues internally, and nothing about the broader issues of assuring coherence of purpose and learner experience. FEDA's literature search revealed little additional information on these aspects of coherence. The only available articles in education journals related specifically to the National Curriculum and were not relevant to further education. The conclusion must be that although the coherence of learning programmes is often expressed as a concern within all levels of the educational system, little sustained debate or research has taken place outside those examples cited above.

5. The participating colleges

Two colleges were questioned in detail about the infrastructure support they provided to ensure coherence of purpose, delivery and assessment. The research also sought to highlight aspects of good practice and to identify any gaps in systems. The main focus was on provision for part-time students.

Issues

The following issues emerged:

1. This work dealt mainly with part-time students
2. Those involved acknowledged the cost of assuring coherence of purpose, delivery and assessment to students not on full-time or substantial part-time programmes and in particular to those students on provision which took place off the main campus and outside normal teaching hours. This may well be a barrier to providing the full support necessary.
3. Neither college offered any entitlement to guidance on evening provision even though guidance was available through subject tutors or duty managers. (Part-time students could also access the guidance facilities within the colleges.)
4. Both colleges had sophisticated and well developed systems for meeting the induction and guidance needs of full-time and substantial part-time students. These should be able to ensure the coherence of student purpose.
5. The key role in ensuring ongoing guidance and support and access to central college services for all students is that of the personal tutor. Both providers operated a standardised induction process for full-time students which clearly identified the role and responsibilities of personal tutors.
6. Neither college allocated a personal tutor to part-time students; the subject tutor undertook that role where necessary.
7. Subject tutors in evening class provision did not necessarily know about possible progression routes or central services within the college and were therefore an unreliable source of guidance.
8. Current systems for part-time students do not systematically collect information about student purpose. In one college a member of the Central Admissions and Guidance team undertakes the personal tutor role for modular infill students, i.e. where students are taking modules from full-time provision. In the other college that role is undertaken by a personal tutor.
9. There was no central system for ensuring coherence where a student is studying on units from different courses or across qualification routes.

Findings

- There was a need to distinguish between part-time short course provision and modular infill on full-time provision. The aspirations and experiences of learners on these two types of provision could be markedly different.
- Where part-time provision was 'outreach' the relationship to the central services and systems of the college was potentially more tenuous. Accreditation of provision can encourage and strengthen those links
- Neither college held descriptions of learning in module descriptors available on a college-wide basis in a consistent format. Module descriptors, where available, used identified co-requisite and pre-requisite modules which could help protect coherence and more easily identify gaps and overlaps in learning and assessment.
- Tensions could exist between college management who wanted to maximise flexibility and departmental tutors who want to protect coherence. Both colleges identified a need to clarify the advantages of greater student choice to subject tutors.

- Where student choices cut across departments it was recognised that the opportunities for tutors to discuss individual student progress were limited. This would be exacerbated if students were combining daytime and evening study or main site and outreach.
- It was agreed that where synoptic assessment of an individual learning programme was possible, it could benefit the learner in helping them to pull together the different strands of their programme. It was also agreed, however, that not all definitions of coherence would include synoptic assessment and there was a need to identify criteria.

Research amongst the student group

The research was carried out among students through a questionnaire. The two participating colleges identified groups of students, some of whom were taking mixed programmes, while others were part-time day and evening students. Some of the students were studying at outreach centres.

The results of the questionnaire are in appendix 2, expressed as percentages.

The students questioned included those on short-course provision, those taking modules and units of national qualifications and students on a range of community education. Most students were studying for either a combination of personal and professional development or for professional development only. This is reflected in the importance placed on obtaining a qualification (60%).

The design of the programmes and the qualifications chosen were influenced by a combination of work and HE requirements. Comments included:

I chose this subject to get a better understanding of computers.

I wish to progress to a degree in Science

Wanted knowledge of specific software.

It is helpful in my work.

There was a wide variety of answers to questions about what help is available from the college in the design of learning programme. A number named individual tutors, and college managers and others commented on open days.

Comments included:

advice from (individual lecturer) very helpful

(after completing previous course) I went to the open day and found people very helpful. In hindsight it might be a good idea if staff knew the different courses that students did and were aware of why they were mixing and matching them so that they could advise the student even when the student did not ask for advice

Most students felt they got enough help from the college in making their choices but 30% said they had received no formal induction. It is also unclear whether the students who said they had received induction to the college had done so or whether they had received an introduction to the course. This was especially true of the students taking evening or community education provision. An analysis of the questions relating to coherence of student purpose gave clear indications of the role the college played in assisting the students to make choices. Good practice was identified as well as gaps within systems.

The questions about coherence of student experience on course, and in particular about delivery and assessment, received less satisfactory answers. Less than 2% of students identified difficulty with volume and range of assessment but at the time of the questionnaire they had only been on course for some eight weeks. The project team felt that it would be necessary to check these questions with students on completion of their studies.

Conclusions

The responses to the questionnaires reinforce the main findings of initial research on guidance and induction. They provide less information about coherence of delivery and assessment. Students were generally pleased, rather than distracted, by any differences between their programmes.

6. Changes in the participating colleges

As a result of involvement with the project, the participating colleges identified the following changes which need to take place.

Short term changes

- subject tutors need to know the full extent of a student's learning programme in the college
- part-time tutors need to be aware of the role of the personal tutor role and be provided with support materials

Long term changes

- all part-time tutors should receive formal staff development on the role of the personal tutor
- the college induction process should be evaluated in the context of the needs of different student groups
- descriptions of learning (e.g. module descriptors/course profiles) should be consistent across the organisation and accessible to all tutors

Good practice

The findings of the desk research, the responses by colleges and the results of the questionnaire suggested that the following guidelines and the checklists which appear on pages 18-20 would help assure the coherence of individual learning programmes.

Guidelines

1. College admissions and induction processes need systematically to identify learners who are using a modularised and unitised curriculum to accumulate credit (collect units) for a specific vocational or academic purpose. This is particularly important when the learning does not fit within the parameters of a recognised qualification and when the learner may not be aiming for a final, externally validated qualification.

2. While external awarding bodies specify the purpose of their overall qualification, they do not take responsibility for delivery and assessment experience of a learner who is accumulating units or credits towards the qualification, or studying an individual collection of units. This is the responsibility of the provider.

3. Providers therefore need to have systems and a QA framework which assure coherence of delivery and assessment for a student accumulating credits or units over a period of time which falls outside the normal 'course' parameters or transferring credits or units from one organisation on to another.

Issues affecting a QA framework

A QA framework for individual learning programmes should address the following issues.

- The provider should determine which elements of their provision can be covered by a QA framework for individual learning programmes.
- Students identified as following a number of units, modules or short programmes for a specific purpose should receive appropriate guidance. Guidance should cover:
 - student purpose and programme design
 - identification of key skills requirements
 - identification of ability at entry
- Where subject tutors take the role of personal tutor, the role should be clearly identified. Where students are isolated from central student services through studying on outreach or in the evening then this role is increasingly important.
- There needs to be a clear link between initial guidance and college and programme induction which ensures that students have all necessary information.
- An individual member of the provider's staff should have the responsibility for

taking an overview of the total choice of the student. This individual should monitor:

- appropriate choice of learning to meet student purpose
 - any gaps or duplicated learning
 - key skills requirements and acquisition
 - range of delivery methods
 - range of assessment methods
 - amount of assessment
- Both staff and students could make better choices where a whole college curriculum is described in module descriptors which are readily available to all members of staff and give consistent information on delivery, assessment and co-requisite and pre-requisite learning. Unit descriptors often do not give sufficient information.
 - There are benefits in involving different staff members as a team in the delivery of an individual learning programme for planning purposes and discussion of student achievement.
 - Centralised systems are needed for collecting information on a student's progress and an individual staff member identified to monitor progress.
 - Providers should consider the use of synoptic assessment to draw together the experience of the learner and ensure that they can make connections between the different parts of their programme.

The following pages 18-20 contain checklists for use by colleges to identify the main elements of a system for quality assuring the coherence of individual programmes of learning.

Checklist A: Coherence of student purpose

Checklist criteria	Current situation	Changes needed
1. What systems does the college offer to clarify the initial aspirations of a student entering the institution?		
2. Who is involved?		
3. Do these systems apply to all learners and modes of delivery, i.e. part time and full time, daytime and evening, workshop provision, distance learning, etc?		
4. How is this information recorded?		
5. How is this information disseminated and to whom?		
6. Is the approach different between learners enrolling on national qualifications, i.e. prescribed programmes and learners enrolling on individual or customised programmes?		
7. Who is responsible for monitoring the suitability of a programme in the light of possible changes in learner aspirations?		
8. Is the monitoring process centrally co-ordinated or departmental ?		
9. How are any changes identified by the monitoring process disseminated to the tutors involved in the learner's programme of study?		

Checklist B: Coherence of programme design

Checklist criteria	Current situation	Changes needed
1. Who is responsible for final approval of the design of an individual learning programme?		
2. What criteria exist to ensure that an individually designed programme meets its intended purpose?		
3. How is the integrity of the programme protected in the sequencing of the learning?		
4. What is the form of programme induction? Is it the same for all modes of delivery and 'departments'?		
5. How is the learner's starting ability diagnosed across different areas of learning?		
6. How are any additional key skills requirements (e.g. study skills, literacy and numeracy, IT or practical skills) assessed and fed back into the guidance process?		
7. Who is responsible for identifying gaps in learning and any repeated learning and how is this monitored?		
8. What information is given to the learner in the form of module descriptors, unit specification etc.? Is this in a college-wide format or is it dependent on qualification route, mode of study, departmental decision, etc.?		

Checklist C: Coherence of the learning experience and assessment

Checklist criteria	Current situation	Changes needed
1. Who is responsible for taking a synoptic view of the overall learning experience and monitoring the learning experience?		
2. How is this recorded and co-ordinated?		
3. Who is responsible for taking a synoptic view of the assessment experience of the learner?		
4. Who is responsible for taking a synoptic view of the achievement of the learner?		
5. How is this recorded?		
6. How is this co-ordinated and fed back into process 1 and 2 above?		
7. What arrangements exist to ensure that assessment does not dominate or distort the pattern of delivery?		

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

This appendix contains the questionnaire which was used with students and the notes for questioners.

Instructions to participating project college leaders

The following questions are designed to collect information on the current practice in the two participating institutions. This information will go alongside desk research by the project consultant on the practice as documented within other institutions, current research and any advice and guidance on programme design published by external validating and awarding bodies.

The questionnaire is designed for use in face-to-face interviews between students and a questioner who understands the aims of the project. It is designed to collect qualitative data which will inform the work of the project.

Coleg Llandrillo are to identify and interview 20 students on their modular infill and evening IT programmes who are combining programmes and modules to make up an individual learning programme.

Deeside College are to identify and interview twenty students from their IT programme (daytime/evening) and one other (NWACC to be informed) who are combining programmes and modules to make up an individual learning programme.

For each student interviewed provide the background information (see in the next column). This will then give us 'case studies'. While the answers should not give the name of the student, please ensure that students have an identifier which will allow us to track back in case we identify further questions. I suggest that you allocate a number to each student which will allow them to be identified in your college system.

Background information

Student identification number:

Please collect the following information for each student and attach it to their answers to the above questions.

1. Date of birth
2. Gender
3. Previous qualifications (list all)
4. Previous relevant experience/training.
5. Employed status
 - registered unemployed
 - unwaged
 - in full time work
 - in part-time work
 - retired

There are also notes for questioners on page 23 which may be useful for confirming the focus of the different systems.

If the answer to one question is subsumed within another then please indicate this.

Coherence of learning programme questionnaire

Student identification number:

1. What are you studying?
2. Do you know why you are studying it?
3. How did you decide what to study?
4. What help did you get from the college?
5. Did you get enough help or would you have liked more?
6. Did you have an induction process?
7. Was the induction process adequate? Were you told about the availability of the library, other resources, or where to go for guidance while you are 'on course'?
8. Were you asked about your future plans? Did this make a difference to your programme?
9. Do you experience any differences in teaching methods on different courses/modules/units?
10. If you experience a variety of teaching methods do you find this helpful or not? Can you say why?
11. Do you understand the assessment requirements of the courses/modules/units you are studying?
12. Is there any overlap in the assessment requirements?
13. Are you assessed too often?
14. Do those teaching you make links across the different parts of your course/programme?
15. Do you think that the various parts of your programme are linked together properly?
16. Do you ever review the whole of what you are doing to see if it is still suitable for your needs?
17. Do you see any evidence that your teachers talk to each other about you or your work?
18. How important was recognised accreditation and the kind of qualification available in your choice of course?

Notes to the interviewers

The numbers on these notes cross refer to the questions. The notes are for guidance only and are not meant to limit comment. It is also recognised that some questions could elicit the same information from some learners. This is recognised but we still feel all the questions should be asked in order to draw out the required information from the learner.

1. Please give qualification routes (GNVQ, NVQ, Access etc) and programme, module or unit titles.
2. Possible answers could be:
 - return to education
 - vocational training
 - interest
 - personal development
 - etc.
3. This question refers to the actual make up of the individual's programme i.e. how they chose the actual options they are taking.
4. Possible sources include prospectus or other literature, central guidance services, departments, individual lecturers etc.
5. Self explanatory but if the answer is negative try to find out what else was needed.
6. Was this process college wide, departmental, etc.
7. Self explanatory.
8. Self explanatory
9. Different teaching methods could cover modes of delivery e.g. workshop, distance learning etc or different styles between academic or vocational.
10. Self explanatory.
11. Please list the different approaches e.g. continuous, end test, externally set tests and if possible link them to the different methods such as essays, tests, presentations, etc.
12. Are they assessed on the same thing more than once?
13. Self explanatory.
14. Are the links there in the perception of the student.
15. This question is with the emphasis on 'properly'.
16. How would this happen and who would be involved?
17. Try to probe and see whether this causes any difficulties?
18. Self explanatory but if it was important find out why.

Appendix 2: Responses to the student questionnaire

The following are the responses to the student questionnaire by percentage.

1. What are you studying?

31% of the students were studying IT short course provision. Half of those were combining IT with other subjects.

25% were modular infill on National Qualifications

19% were studying GNVQ with additional from other schools or programme areas.

Of the remaining students:

1 was studying Access part time

1 was studying a combination of Wood Carving, Carpentry and Joinery and Furniture Restoration

1 was studying Basic Counselling with Word processing

1 was Studying Sign Language with other subjects

3 were studying introductory languages with other subjects

2. Do you know why you are studying your programme?

32% were studying for personal and professional development

38% were studying for professional development only

20% were studying for personal development only

10% didn't know why they were studying

3. How did you decide what to study?

55% chose their study from a combination of work and HE requirements

30% chose their study because of personal interest in the content

12% Wanted to obtain a qualification

1 student didn't know

4. What help did you get from the college?

5. Did you get enough help or would you have liked more?

81% received enough help

Only two students said they would have liked more help.

Comments included:

Because of vast range on offer considerable help is needed (a GNVQ and A level student)

6 & 7. Did you have an induction process and was it adequate?

Most of those responding, across a wide range of answers, expressed satisfaction with the induction process or felt they didn't need one. It is significant, however, that:

about 30% of the students received no induction. Most of these were on community education or evening class programmes.

15% of the students thought the induction process was inadequate

about 20% felt they needed no induction

The answers to this question reflect the variety of ways that enterprising students get information. The questions mask informal networks which exist between students and between students and lecturers.

Comments included:

I felt a bit lost on the first day ... it seemed very disorganised and confused (module infill student)

Would have liked a more detailed induction but knew to go to personal tutor (module infill student)

8 Were you asked about future plans?

58% were asked and of these 12% (of the total number) changed their programme.

42% were not asked

9 & 10. Did you experience differences in teaching methods and is this helpful or otherwise?

90% of students experienced differences in teaching methods and all but one found this helpful. Some students saw differences in approach by tutors as very beneficial.

None were directly critical but one student would have liked a more 'structured' approach in both her options.

11. Do you understand the assessment requirements of what you are studying?

Yes	Sometime s/vaguely	No	Did not respond
75%	7%	15%	3%

12. Is there any overlap in assessment requirements?

Yes	No	Don't know
10%	48%	41%

In order to get a more meaningful response (reading between the lines many students didn't really understand the question) students would need to be asked the same question on completion of their studies.

13. Are you assessed too often?

Yes	No	Don't know
4%	89%	8%

The comment made at 10 above applies to this question.

14. Are links made by those teaching you across different parts of your programme or course?

Yes	No	N/A	Don't know	Partly
43%	14%	32	7	3%

15. Do you think the various parts of your programme are linked together properly?

Yes	N/A	Don't know	No
55%	26%	15	4%

16. Do you ever review the whole of what you are doing to see if it is still suitable for your needs?

Yes	No	Don't know
64%	21%	14

The answers to this question failed to differentiate between students personal reflection and more formal review with a lecturer or guidance worker.

17. Do you see any evidence that teachers talk to each other about you or your work?

Yes	No	Don't know /NA	Possibly
32%	28%	32%	7%

18. How important was recognised accreditation and the kind of qualification in your choice of course?

Very important	Important	Not important
30%	30%	40%

These percentages more or less correspond to the figures for 2. There were some anomalies but generally those students who were studying for personal development reasons were the least interested in qualifications.

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